Two Approaches to Power at Work:

Situational Versus Dispositional Theories of Control

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Abstract

When conducting research on workplaces, scholars make assumptions concerning the relative efficacy of *dispositions* (the beliefs and aptitudes a worker brings into her position) versus *situations* (the immediate pressures of the work process) for the successful exercise of power in the organization. Too often, however, these assumptions are made without reflection and are not made explicit. This paper constitutes a clarion call to make our assumptions on this issue clear. It does so by comparing the research programs of two influential sociologists: Pierre Bourdieu, who argued for the ingrained power of the *habitus*; and Michael Burawoy, who drew attention to the seductive power of *work games*. The conclusion argues that the two concepts may have an elective affinity with different methodologies (interviewing versus participant observation), and be more appropriate for different structural arrangements (loosely versus highly structured work processes).

Introduction: When is a Smirk just a Smirk?

The release in 2004 of photographs taken by US military personnel at the Abu Ghraid prison in Iraq sent shockwaves –and shivers—around the world. The pictures, of soldiers smiling and looking otherwise nonchalant in the presence of bodies tortured and killed, symbolized for many the hubris and depravity of US foreign policy under George W. Bush. The smirking soldiers, we may say, stood in a relation of metonymy to an imperialist America: they were a part representative of the whole. Over the past four years, however, we have come to learn more about the particular individuals who took and appeared in these photographs. Several were tried and sentenced for their role in the abuse; others have spoken publicly about their time working at Abu Ghraid. From this documentation there has emerged a more complex picture of what went on behind the prison walls, and in turn a more nuanced understanding of the roles played by these particular individuals.

For instance, Philip Gourevitch and Errol Morris, in their recent book *Standard Operating Procedure* (2008), argue that the photos were taken only at the tail end of a longer process of socialization into a very peculiar occupational subculture. They cite the example of Sabrina Harman (pictured below), a 26 year old woman who had enlisted in the Army to pay for college. During basic training, Harmon was mocked by co-enlistees for being a humanitarian. "She was," according to one, "just too nice to be a soldier." And we now know that while she was initially horrified by what she saw at Abu Ghraid, her sense of indignation faded with time. As she stated in a letter home to her girlfriend: "In the beginning, you see somebody naked and you see underwear on their head, and you're like, 'Oh that's pretty bad—I can't believe I just saw that.' And then you come back the next day and you see something worse. Well, it seems like the day before wasn't so bad." Harman was convicted of a felony and served six months in prison, while no upper-level military personnel were prosecuted for any wrongdoings at Abu Ghraid. The soldiers, in sum, are increasingly seen less as symbols of US foreign policy, than as themselves tokens and scapegoats within a larger bureaucratic apparatus—one which, in the formulation of Robert Jackall (1989), pulls credit upward and pushes responsibility downward.

The Abu Ghraid scandal also stimulated thought and debate among social scientists. For instance, parallels were drawn with the infamous social psychology experiments conducted at Stanford University in the 1970s, during which otherwise normal undergraduates, when asked to role play as prison guards, treated other students in an abusive and sadistic manner (Zimbardo 2008). Such events are viewed as cases of a larger phenomenon. They raise a fundamental question: to what extent is action determined by an individual's ingrained disposition, versus the situational pressures exerted upon him or her? To what extent are monsters born? To what extent made?

Perhaps the most well-known (and parsimonious) solution to this problem is the social psychologist Kurt Lewin's (1936) heuristic equation: B=f(P,E), where B stands for behavior, P personality, and E the immediate environment. It would be hard to argue the contrary, that some combination of individual attributes (i.e., a disposition) and local conditions (a situation) do NOT in some way interact to influence behavior. But as an ethnographer and a sociologist who studies the organization of work, I find a general equation of this sort to offer little assistance when conducting research on specific organizations and their personnel. I would instead view the case of Abu Ghraid through the lens of theories of the *labor process* (i.e., the social and material organization of actual work practices). Scholars writing in this tradition have long shown that tasks which appear to the outsider observer as abhorrent (one could think of work within meat processing plants—the infamous "disassembly lines" documented by Upton Sinclair) can in fact be routinized and experienced as mundane labor—as "just a job" one has to do." (And conversely, work which appears on the surface to be repetitive and mundane can be experienced as thrilling and enthralling). The trick is to look at any individual behavior as not simply a function of personality and the general environment, but as a socially meaningful act. One, furthermore, embedded within larger systems of power and control. To induce a 22 year old woman to beat and torture men (and occasionally children) against whom she holds

now personal grudge, is a remarkable “achievement” (in the ethnomethodological sense). The case of Abu Ghraid is of course an extreme one, but it raised again a series of classic questions on the relationship between a worker’s pre-existing dispositions and his or her “on the job” behavior. How do those who control an organization control those who work within it? Are they able to select certain individuals predisposed to act a certain way? Or does the work culture emerge *sui generis*?

This paper does not aspire to provide a definitive answer to these questions. Its goal is considerably more modest. I argue that all organizational researchers, when collecting data, and interpreting results, make assumptions concerning *the relative power of dispositions versus situations*. Too often, however, these assumptions are made without reflection, nor are we subsequently called upon to defend them by our peers. This paper thus asks that we make explicit our theoretical assumptions concerning the relative efficacy of dispositions versus situations when researching the working of power in organizations. It compares the programs of two theoretical approaches with much influence in the field: that of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu and that of the US sociologist Michael Burawoy.

My argument proceeds as follows. First, I provide a brief history of the debate as it emerged in the realm of managerial theory in the United States during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Second, I introduce the theories of Bourdieu and Burawoy, by tracing their origins to parallel fieldwork projects performed in Africa during the waning years of colonialism. Third, I elaborate upon the key elements of each theory and consider their implications for “power at work.” Finally, I make a case for matching our theoretical assumptions concerning the relative causal efficacy of dispositions versus situations to the precise nature of the organization under consideration.

Part One: Brief History of a Debate

Our story begins with the founding father of scientific management—Frederick Taylor—and his initial attempt to impose his new system of routinized control (1911). Taylor had been appointed a foreman at the Bethlehem Steel Works. Here he encountered a group of workers who systematically “soldiered”—i.e., they conspired among themselves to labor at a level and intensity below that which Taylor considered to be a maximum. At first, Taylor sought a situational solution to soldiering. He transformed the system of incentives to encourage workers to increase their output. But this produced no discernable change in work pace. Next, he fired a group of workers, brought in a group of replacements, and trained them from scratch to work at a breakneck pace. Once these new workers began hauling pig iron, however, they immediately reverted back to the pace of the previous workers. It was at this point that Taylor gave up on situational theories, and embraced a dispositional one.

Taylor began a search for the perfect worker. He found him in "Schmidt," a well-built Dutch immigrant. What made Schmidt ideal for Taylorism were a set of innate attributes. First, Schmidt was "close" with his money—he was by nature a sparing and thrifty man. Second, Schmidt possessed an intrinsic work ethic. Taylor surmised this by observing Schmidt "trotting down to work in the morning." Third, Schmidt, an immigrant who spoke in broken English, possessed but a middling intellect and could thus be easily manipulated. Consider Taylor's report of his conversation with Schmidt:

> Schmidt was called out from among the gang of pig-iron handlers and talked to somewhat in this way:
>
> "Schmidt, are you a high-priced man?" "
>
> "Vell, I don't know vat you mean."
>
> "Oh yes, you do. What I want to know is whether you are a high-priced man or not."
>
> "Vell, I don't know vat you mean."
>
> "Oh, come now, you answer my questions. What I want to find out is whether you are a high-priced man or one of these cheap fellows here. What I want to find out is whether you want to earn $1.85 a day or whether you are satisfied with $1.15, just the same as all those cheap fellows are getting." "
>
> Did I vant $1.85 a day? Vas dot a high-priced man? Vell, yes, I vas a high-priced man."
>
> "Oh, you're aggravating me. Of course you want $1.85 a day — every one wants it! You know perfectly well that that has very little to do with your being a high-priced man. For goodness' sake answer my questions, and don't waste any more of my time."…
>
> "Vell, den, I vas a high-priced man."
>
> "Now, hold on, hold on. You know just as well as I do that a high-priced man has to do exactly as he's told from morning till night. You have seen this man here before, haven't you?"
>
> "No, I never saw him."
>
> "Well, if you are a high-priced man, you will do exactly as this man tells you to-morrow, from morning till night"…
>
> This seems to be rather rough talk. And indeed it would be if applied to an educated mechanic, or even an intelligent laborer. With a man of the mentally sluggish type of Schmidt it is appropriate and not unkind, since it is effective in fixing his attention on the high wages which he wants and away from

> what, if it were called to his attention, he probably would consider impossibly hard work. (1911: 44-46)

Thus, by relying on a set of key indicators (the pace at which Schmidt ran to work, the heavy foreign accent in his speech, etc.), Taylor found the ideal worker: strong in bone, tight in purse, and sluggish in mind. The key point for our purposes is that Taylor claimed Schmidt to be *perfectly pre-constituted* for the task at hand. Once Taylor found this specimen, any need to monitor and discipline him proved superfluous. Personality no longer interacted with environment to produce behavior. Rather, it provided a buffer against the environment (especially the informal norms of the workgroup) to determine action.

Subsequent historical scholarship has established that Taylor's account of Schmidt was largely fictional (Braverman 1974). The account nonetheless had consequences, as it contributed to the emergence in the early twentieth century of an entire branch of industrial psychology dedicated to the science of employee screening. By administering to potential workers a battery of test questions, pioneers in the field of applied psychology—such as Hugo Munsterburg—could claim to make managers' lives easier. Each potential worker possessed a single, unitary and, most importantly, unmalleable personality. Find the right person for the job and the task of control was done. The contemporary industries dedicated to the drug-testing of job applicants attests to the continued efficacy of this managerial dream.

The backlash to this utopian managerial vision came from several sources. On one hand, the testing batteries designed by the psychologists did a notoriously poor job of predicting which workers would prove pliable at the point of production. On the other hand, industrial sociologists began venturing into the workplace, where they rediscovered the "workgroup'" that had stimulated Taylor's search for Schmidt in the first place. Through *in sutu* observations of workers on the job, and even the occasional stint of participant observation, researchers drew attention to the sui generis character of the workplace. Organizational life could not be understood as a summation of individual level characteristics (as measured through a questionnaire); it was an emergent culture forged by the relations among workers and their collective attempt to deal with the constraints they faced.

This issue, of the degree to which behavior is a function of an individual's pre-existing disposition versus the local situation, is far from resolved in the study of work today. Rarely, however, are researchers' assumptions made explicit concerning this fundamental puzzle. When trying to make sense of how it is that particular managerial control strategies do (or do not) work, we necessarily make assumptions concerning this question. We have to take a stance on the issue. Furthermore, the particular assumptions we make have important consequences for our larger arguments, yet it is not often that the

researcher makes them explicit. They are, in Latour's phraseology, black boxed. What follows is a call to unpack these boxes, to be reflexive concerning this issue.

Two of the dominant approaches in social science and organizational studies today take widely opposing stances regarding the relative role of dispositions versus situations. On one hand we have the research program pioneered by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. It argues for the priority of dispositions—*the durability of the habitus*—in shaping behavior within organizations. On the other hand we have the research tradition spearheaded by the US-based sociologist Michael Burawoy. It argues for the priority of situations—*the enchantment of work-games*—in shaping action on the organizational floor.

Part Two: Bourdieu versus Burawoy: Origins at Work

The theories of Pierre Bourdieu and Michael Burawoy derive from common origins in ethnographic fieldwork in late-colonial Africa. Both studied the way in which colonized populations adapted to the colonial system. And both focused on work regimes. Their accounts diverge sharply, however, concerning the question of how control operates in colonial work regimes.

We'll start with Pierre Bourdieu, best known for his studies of late twentieth century French society, that covered a variety of major institutional spheres (consumption, politics, education, housing markets, etc.). His first major empirical study, however, occurred in north Africa. After receiving his doctorate in philosophy, Bourdieu was drafted into the French army during the Algerian war for independence. There he conducted ethnological research among the Kabyle people, which resulted in the books *The Algerians, Travail et Travailleurs en Algérie (*published in English as *Algeria 1960)*, and others. This fieldwork grappled with many dimensions of life among Algerian peasants—their relationship with the land, household structures, gender relations—but a central focus was the *peasants' experience with work and the way in which this experience was disrupted by colonization and the peasant's entry into modern labor markets*.

The picture that Bourdieu paints in these works is a discomforting one. It is a story of the failure of the Algerian peasant to adjust to the modern capitalist economy imposed by the French. According to Bourdieu, pre-colonial Algerian peasant society was characterized by a traditional "ethos." These "technico-ritual schemes of perception and assessment" were "inculcated by material conditions of existence" (1960: 9): namely, an agrarian economy and a social order structured around status (a "sense of honor"). In the realm of production, the traditional peasant acted not as an economically-rational, forward-looking actor. Rather, his "schemes of perception" were attuned to the past, and generated in him a "desire to conform to inherited models" (ibid.: 9). His "temporal consciousness" (ibid.: 16) was oriented not towards a future that could be imagined and changed, but towards past "inherited models" to be conformed to.

Even the peasant's relation to the land upon which he labored was understood by him through traditional models. To toil on the land was to honor nature; it was to offer her a gift that will generate the counter-gift of a bountiful harvest:

> The peasant does not, strictly speaking, labour: he takes pains. "Give [your sweat] to the earth", says the proverb. This can be taken to mean that nature, obedient to the logic of the gift exchange, grants her benefits only to those who bring her their toil in tribute…[T]asks of farming, such as ploughing or harvesting, impose themselves with the arbitrary rigor of traditional duties, with the same necessity as the rites which are inseparable from them (ibid.: 23).

So deeply entrenched was his traditional disposition, that the peasant could not readily adjust to life in the economy foisted onto Algeria by the French colonizers. Had he had decades to adjust to the more stringent rhythms of capitalist production, the peasant perhaps could have done so. But this was not the case:

> With growing adaptation to the capitalist economy and growing assimilation of the corresponding dispositions comes increasing tensions between the traditional norms…and the imperatives of an individualistic, calculating economy. The sub-proletarians are subjected to contradictory pressures which give rise to ambiguous attitudes…[and] a disorganization of conduct (ibid.: 48-49).

The series of dysfunctional behaviors exhibited by the peasant Bourdieu labeled a "traditionalism of despair."

We now turn to the early writings of another influential sociologist. Michael Burawoy, like Pierre Bourdieu, undertook his first research project in Africa. As a student at the University of Manchester, Burawoy had studied under the anthropologists Jaap Van Velsen and Max Gluckman. The latter was the director of the Livingston institute in Rhodesia, a British colony that would become the country of Zambia. In the late 1960s, Burawoy began fieldwork in Zambia by working as a research associate in a copper mine. The mining industry was (and still is) vitally important to the national economy, and the black African labor force was vitally important to the industry. As in South Africa, these workers were typically drawn from rural areas. They too had been raised with a set of "traditional" dispositions. And they too were thrust into a "modern," capitalist economy.

Unlike Bourdieu, however, Burawoy emphasized the flexibility of these workers' dispositions. In his book, *The Colour of Class* (1972), he does not treat the peasant as being

pulled irrevocably across the gulf separating the "traditional" world from the "modern" one. He argued against an approach such as Bourdieu's, that "conceives the 'developmental' process as a struggle between 'modern' and 'traditional' values." In line with Gluckman, Burawoy assumed the African to be a savvy social actor able to move fluidly back and forth between them: "An African townsman is a townsman, an African miner is a miner…when a man returns from the towns into the political area of his tribe he is tribalized again—de-urbanized—though not beyond the influence of the town."

Burawoy's empirical study exemplified these assumptions. Like Bourdieu, he discovered African workers who were insecure and seemingly despondent. Unlike Bourdieu, however, he attributed such feelings not to deep-seated dispositions, but to the exigencies of the situations in which these employees found themselves. The government's plan to "Zambianize" the industry had entailed promoting black workers into managerial positions. Too often, however, they were promoted without adequate qualifications, nor were they granted adequate resources to perform their jobs well. As a result, black managers were distrusted by both their white superiors and their black subordinates. This in turn led to a series of on-the-job behaviors—a sullen demeanor, hesitancy to speak up in meetings, general anxiety—that could be interpreted as an innate and despairing disposition. This was in fact the argument of the Zambian state and the white mine managers—they explained the problem of the black worker as one of his inherent deficiencies. Burawoy in contrast saw them as a product of the tension-filled situation (47). As he summarized:

> Thus town life is so structured that 'rural' life loses its significance, and rather than use 'traditional' life as a frame of reference the sociologist should take as his frame of reference urban and industrial situations elsewhere in the world…[W]here the social structure rigidly defines social behaviour through an enforceable set of norms, beliefs and values, then other unrelated social structures are of diminishing significance. (8)

In sum, Bourdieu and Burawoy differ in how they interpreted the plight of the proletarianized peasant.

Part Three: Habitus versus Games

Following their initial research products in late-colonial Africa, Burawoy and Bourdieu went on to generate extensive research programs. Burawoy honed his substantive interest in the workplace, but "went global." He studied the organization of labor processes in factories in the United States, Hungary and Russia. Bourdieu in turn abandoned the study of work and "went local." He produced a series of studies of French society—of education, consumption, art, etc. Furthermore, the differences delineated in the previous section—between the power of dispositions versus situations—would bloom into a full-fledged theoretical chasm. In short, Burawoy held the institution (the workplace) constant and

looked how it varied across societies. Bourdieu in turn held the society (modern France) constant and looked at various institutions within it. In this section I compare the key concepts structuring these two theories—habitus versus games—as well as their implications for studying power in organizations. I also discuss examples from my own empirical studies of power in the workplace.

Habitus at Work: "A Fish in Water"

Pierre Bourdieu elaborated upon his early account of the tenacity of the peasant mindset through his concept of habitus. As he explained in his essay "The Genesis of the Concepts Habitus and Field" (1985), Bourdieu used the term—which had existed as early as the writings of Aristotle—to make sense of the accordance he observed (both in Algeria and France) between the objective structures of the social world and the mental structures through which people perceived and acted upon the world. The habitus is the key idea through which Bourdieu bridges the divide between structuralist and phenomenological philosophies generally.

Bourdieu referred to the habitus as a "structured and structuring "disposition (1984: 170). To say a habitus is *structuring* is to draw attention to the active cognitive and bodily processes through which agents act upon the world. We are not, as the behaviorists would have it, automatons responding to external stimuli. Rather, we put to use cognitive schemata to classify its things into discrete categories; we exhibit a particular orientation to time that guides our short and long term strategies; and, when interacting with others in real space and time, we exhibit a "creative improvisation" in our practices. Nonetheless, these various categorization schemes, strategies, and practices—though they may be active—are not randomly distributed throughout the population.

Indeed, Bourdieu claims the habitus is *structured*. By this he means that it is a function of one's socialization. It starts off with an individual's initial incorporation into the primary group—e.g., language training and educational lessons given by one's parents. This constitutes a "baseline" disposition. On top of it are successive additional layers, each acquired during one's socialization into new fields and social worlds. The take-home message is that in order to understand the actions of any individual in any situation, it is important to know the general structure of that situation as well as the resources possessed by the individual. But the analyst must also seek to uncover the individual's early upbringing and subsequent biography. He must, in short, do a history of the individual. This is what Bourdieu means when he states (1984: 111) that Practice = Field + (Capital)(Habitus), where Habitus = (Inculcation)(Trajectory).

I now move from the general outlines of Bourdieu's theory as it developed in the decades following his initial study of workers in Algeria, to the implications of this theory for those studying power in the modern workplace. I label it a "fish in water" theory of power, for it emphasizes the need for organizational elites to select the right sort of worker for the job.

We see here an interesting convergence between Bourdieu's theory and that of the original writings of Frederick Taylor! Both would argue that successful management depends less

upon the set-up of work-tasks, than the correct selection of workers to perform the task. Taylor's system of scientific management, as rational and as formally efficient as it may have been, could not be implemented at first because of the recalcitrance of traditional workers. It was only by finding Schmidt—the perfectly pre-constituted worker—that scientific management was finally inscribed in production. Similarly, Bourdieu argues that even in a tightly regulated workplace, one cannot eliminate the effect of the habitus. As he states in the only book in which he returned (albeit briefly) to the subject of work, *The Social Structure of the Economy*, it is "habitus that steps in to fill the gaps in the regulation [of work]." A properly structured labor process is one to which a worker will take like a fish to water. It will present her with a world *homologous* to that of her childhood experiences in the family, her schooling, her early work experiences, and so on. The worker's pre-existing disposition will match the structure the work situation, thus minimizing the need to exert ongoing effort to discipline and control the worker .

Bourdieu's theory of power at work has concrete implications for how we study the design of organizational procedures and routines. First, it implies that managers will devote the majority of their energy towards selecting the worker with the right habitus to do the job at hand. Control is a technical issue of employee screening. Management will, first, develop a mental image of the "right" sort of worker disposition; second, they, will design or deploy some type of metric to measure or gauge the degree to which a job candidate possesses this disposition; finally, they may continually calibrate this metric, to ensure that it does indeed have a correlation with subsequent job performance. Second, it implies that such control strategies—when well designed and executed—will be successful (and as a corollary of this second tenet, failed control strategies can be traced to a failure of this process: i.e., a poorly designed screening mechanism).

Case Study 1: Control at a GM Factory through a Bourdieuian Lens

I will now give an example of an empirical study that uses a Bourdieuian approach: my own ethnography of a General Motors automobile factory located in Ohio, USA (Sallaz 2004). The plant had been built in the late 1960s, at the height of the Fordist era of mass production. The location—a small town in the Midwestern part of the country—had been specifically chosen because of the characteristics of the local labor force. Corporate planners, that is, had a very specific preconceived idea about the "ideal" auto assembler. This worker was male (women were assumed to be physically unable to handle heavy assembly work,) young (and thus easily trained), and from a rural background (and thus unsophisticated). In their initial plan for building a regime of mass production at Lordstown, then, management seemingly endorsed a Bourdieuian vision of control.

The subsequent history of labor relations at Lordstown were anything but quiescent. Shortly after its opening, the plant was subject to a speed-up and a series of lay-offs. The cohort of workers hired to staff the plant, contrary to the expectations of management,

rebelled against this new system of production. They engaged in slowdowns, wildcat strikes, and even sabotage. In addressing why control failed at Lordstown in the early 1970s, I developed an explanation based upon the habitus. *I did not argue that worker's imported dispositions had no effects, but that management had incorrectly read them in three important ways*.

First, I showed that management had misread the degree to which workers had come from conditions of material scarcity. These were not, I showed, impoverished and desperate individuals. Rather:

> My interviewees concurred that workers at the time typically had 'something else going on'…to fall back upon in case of a firing from the plant…I asked one respondent: 'Were you worried about getting fired during the wildcat strikes in 1972?' He replied:
>
> > Nah I hated the job so much and besides we were only making seven bucks an hour back then. A buddy of mine was working at [a local steel company] and he was on the lowest paying job. He was making 8.50 an hour…I was sure I could have gotten into a mill if I'd had to.

In addition to other job prospects, many workers continued to draw upon material support from the primary group—their mom and dad—while they worked at the plant. Second, I argued that prior to starting work at Lordstown, workers had already formed a vision of what constituted a "good and respectable" job, based upon their early work experiences in the area's steel industry (which remained organized according to craft principles). Third, the all-male workforce viewed the new imposition of stern discipline as an assault upon their deep-seated sense of masculinity (for instance, workers who went along with managerial directives were labeled "fags" and "pussies"). And fourth, unbeknownst to management, workers, though they lived far from college campuses, imagined themselves to be participants in the counterculture movement of the time. They listened to soul and rock music, took illicit drugs, and espoused an anti-authoritarian attitude across a wide range of lifestyle domains. In short, I argued that in order to understand worker resistance to authoritarian management at Lordstown, it was necessary to consider their prior socialization into various life spheres: the family, the local labor market, a masculine subculture, and the student counterculture.

Habituation to Work: "Sink or Swim"

Just as the subsequent trajectory of Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical project (i.e., an elaboration of the notion of habitus as a means through which to bridge the divide between structural and phenomenological accounts of social life) can be read from his initial attempt to understand the plight of the African worker under colonialism, so can Michael Burawoy's. In Algeria, Bourdieu saw the peasant who could not adjust to the colonial condition—a present that could not break free of the past. Burawoy, however, puzzled why

domination persisted in the post-colonial world—here was a present condition that would not rise up to meet future aspirations.

Burawoy's theoretical project, as it developed in the decades after *The Colour of Class*, looked at dynamic situations rather than intransigent dispositions,. Coming from the neo-Marxist tradition, he sought to see how everyday life within the key institution of capitalism—the workplace—functioned to reproduce the capitalist system as a whole. His major contribution to this literature was to apply general theories of the political system to the factory. Though Burawoy utilized ideas of Nikolas Poulantzas, Jurgen Habermas and others, he drew his greatest inspiration from the work of Antonio Gramsci. In his *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci puzzled why it was that working classes in western Europe had not risen up to overthrow capitalism, while a revolution had occurred in undeveloped Russia. He concluded that the capitalist system in countries such as Italy was protected by civil society: a dense network of associations (schools, churches, clubs, etc.) that served as a buffer between the individual and the state. In Russia, in contrast, civil society had been "primordial and gelatinous," allowing a small revolutionary movement to seize power.

Burawoy, in his book *Manufacturing Consent* (1974), would introduce a similar puzzle. During a stint as a machine operator in a Chicago engine factory, he discovered that workers exerted a great deal of energy relative to their actual wages. They participated, in other words, in their own exploitation. To explain why, Burawoy analyzed the factory as a political system. Under monopoly capitalism, large firms were able to grant workers a variety of concessions such as union representation, a living wage, and freedom from supervision. The system of shop floor governance that emerged functioned like a civil society. For example, potential collective action was individualized and channeled into the union's machinery for processing "grievances." An elaborate internal labor market in turn tied workers to the firm for the duration of their work lives. Like the collective associations and political systems that protected capitalism at the national level, this "hegemonic regime of production" reproduced the capitalist social relations at the level of the factory.

Of the various elements that constituted the hegemonic work regime, however, one was accorded special significance: the "games of work" found on the shop floor. Management established production quotas and employed supervisors to monitor workers. But for the most part, workers were left alone at their machines. Rather than isolated units, workers formed a rich social life—a social order *sui generis*. It was organized and experienced as a "game of making out" in which workers strove to exceed production quotas (to achieve bonus pay), but not by too much (lest management raise the targets). As a result, what looked to the outside observer as dull and monotonous labor was transformed into an enthralling quest to make out.

The work game served a powerful *political function*: it legitimated exploitation. Striving to make out put the worker in an intense situation, one which focused his attention on the "here and now." He was seeking a valuable outcome (a good wage but also esteem from his co-workers) by battling the clock and his machine. No time to think about the big picture! But as importantly, the work game exerted a powerful *leveling effect*: it neutralized any pre-existing dispositions workers may have brought into the workplace. Some operatives were better than others at making out. Some imported into the factory certain skills (e.g., physical strength) that may have helped them play the game. But in general, all workers possessed a minimal social competence—what Gramsci called a "common sense"—that allowed them to play the game. And once he (or she) started working, the experience of game play was so powerful that it would override any preexisting "attitudes," "beliefs," "commitments" and so on. (One cannot simultaneously play a game and question its rules). To prove this claim, Burawoy cited his own experience as an ethnographer. He entered the factory as a student, a foreigner, and a Marxist to boot! If anyone should have been equipped with a "habitus" enabling "resistance", it should have been him. Nonetheless, he himself soon became enthralled with playing the game, thus participating in his own exploitation. Under capitalism, you can play a game of work or you can quit, but there is no in-between. You either sink or you swim.

Burawoy's main theoretical contention— that work games are so powerful *situationally*, as to render irrelevant any outside *dispositions* imported into the workplace—has several implications for studying empirically management and control. Burawoyian research assumptions, furthermore, differ from those discussed above in the Bourdieuian approach. First, the research will be wary of managerial claims that they can preconceive, locate and harness an "ideal worker," perfectly preconstituted for the job at hand. Managers may articulate this claim, and they may even engage in extensive attempts (e.g., the recruitment of certain workers) to bring their dream to fruition. But in the end, "Schmidt" is a fantasy. The researcher must thus explain the core characteristics of a given work process through reference to the emergent properties of the work situation. How does management organize the labor process? How is work experienced on the "shop floor"? What forms of cooperation and conflict emerge at the point of production? And most importantly, does the experience of labor exhibit any game-like properties?

Case Study 2: Two Games of Service Work

To give an example of research from a Burawoyian perspective, I will discuss another of my own research ethnographies. In my book, *The Labor of Luck*, I compare the organization of casino work in the United States and South Africa. Both countries allow large, corporate-operated gambling. And the details of gambling are the same in each, allowing for systematic comparison of labor control strategies. But we find different labor recruitment strategies. In the US, the veteran white managers whom I interviewed were explicit in their desire for immigrant workers. Asian dealers in particular were prized for their supposed loyalty, docility and trustworthiness. Managers in South Africa—veteran white "casino

men"—also sought to staff their properties with trustworthy labor. But they were forced by state affirmative action policies to hire black workers from the inner city, whom they believed to be unruly and prone to theft.

My participant observation as a casino worker, however, revealed that the dynamics of control and resistance on the shop floor were the opposite of managerial expectations concerning workers' dispositions. In the US, immigrant dealers were anything but docile and loyal. They "hustled" players to increase their tip earnings, and schemed among themselves concerning ways to manipulate the games in their own interests. In South Africa, in contrast, black dealers were model employees. They dealt quickly, quietly, and with a startling degree of accuracy. But how to explain these differences? Try as I might, I could not craft and defend a convincing account based on variant habitus. Outside of work, immigrant casino workers in the US lived quiet lives on the margins of society (many were here working illegally), while urban black workers in South Africa were knowledgeable about (and sometimes involved in) radical politics. Outside-of-work dispositions, in short, seemed to be at odds with at-work behaviors.

I finally decided the explanation was to be found in the organization of the work situation—in, that is, the "games" dealers played. Nevada dealers manipulated the cards and broke the "house rules" as part of an "entrepreneurial game" of work. New dealers were socialized into the game, and it allowed them to make more tips and to relieve the drudgery of work. South African dealers in turn played an "effacement game." They were not permitted to make tips, and so sought mainly to avoid outbursts of anger from losing players and management. There were two further pieces of evidence bolstering my claim for the causal efficacy of situations versus dispositions. One was the fact that as I myself moved back and forth between the two field sites, I was able to shift back and forth between entrepreneurial and effacing strategies for working behind the tables. The other was that in each casino there was a minority of workers who came from very different backgrounds than their colleagues (mainly middle class whites). They however played the same sort of work games as did their co-workers, offering final proof that it was situations not dispositions shaping the dynamics of service work.

Firms as Fields: A False Resolution

At this point I will raise and address a counter-argument to my contention that Bourdieu and Burawoy offer divergent perspectives on organizational control. For one could argue that in articulating a Bourdieuian theory of work, I've focused too much on his idea of the habitus and neglected the associated concept of field. In fact, when Bourdieu spoke of fields he often used a game metaphor. To be a skilled social actor is to know how to read other players, to manage one's portfolio of different forms of capital, and to possess a certain "illusio" or emotional investment in the field. If we applied Burawoy's field concept to the workplace, would we not end up with a theory that looked a lot like Burawoy's? Can we, in other words, reconcile Bourdieu and Burawoy through the notion of field?

This is exactly what Bourdieu attempted to do in *The Social Structures of the Economy* (2005). A close reading of this book, however, establishes that the two theories continue to diverge in their treatment of the micro-politics of control and consent.

Bourdieu first establishes that large firms are not unitary actors, but are themselves social fields characterized by internal struggle (69). Those who control the firm possess many forms of resources, and generally "make the rules" that govern the firm-as-field. One form of power is especially important: "bureaucratic power" (131). This consists of the capacity to grant exceptions to official rules, and it is a way to motivate and win the consent of workers and other lower-level personnel: "Holders of bureaucratic power can build up for themselves a symbolic capital that enables them…to mobilize energies…and thereby to achieve a kind of surplus labor and self-exploitation" (132).

This statement seems at first glance to run entirely parallel to Burawoy's argument concerning hegemonic labor games, wherein managers cede control over the production process to workers in exchange for consent to their own exploitation. However, it differs from Burawoy's account in two important ways. First, the mechanism of control is different. In Bourdieu's formulation, control follows the logic of the gift exchange. Having been granted a small freedom from total control, the employee feels indebted to the firm and acts in its interests (much like the notion of "responsible autonomy"). Burawoy would refute this claim. He would say that freedoms granted by management work precisely because they make the worker believe she is independent and resisting authority. It is this false seduction of breaking the rules and pursuing your own interests which function in the end to mask exploitation. Second, Bourdieu explicitly rejects that situations are, in the final analysis, determinative of action. He states that even in "total institutions (such as concentration camps)…agents can, for better or worse, seize upon the discretion offered to them in their actions…to express the socially constituted drives of their habitus" (131).

When does control fail?: Hysteresis versus Disenchantment

So far we have focused on the divergent mechanisms proposed by Bourdieu and Burawoy for why organizational control *succeeds*. But what do the two theories have to say about how and why control *fails*? In line with their larger foci on dispositions versus situations, we find—not surprisingly—two different perspectives on resistance and change generally.

The default picture that Bourdieu paints is one of harmony and reproduction. Social structures produce in individuals a habitus that, all else being equal, serves to reproduce the structure—a situation Bourdieu labels "equilibrium" (1984). This is why I have labeled it a "fish in water" approach to organizational control: a properly worker should need minimal training or supervision, her entire socialization in various life spheres having prepared her for this moment. Her skills and aspirations, in short, match perfectly the demands and possibilities of her job. We can see here too why Bourdieu speaks of the habitus as a "wound spring" (2001: 38): the individual is already "geared up," preconstituted, full of potential energy to be harnessed by those in control of the organization (and especially its selection procedures).

This system of equilibrium can be interrupted, with two possible results. On one hand, a poorly fitted habitus can lead to despair. Consider the Algerian peasant under colonialism, equipped with the "wrong" (i.e., premodern) disposition, thrust into a position (the modern world of wage labor) for which he wasn't prepared. He is here a "fish out of water," thrashing about and confused, in a state of "hysteresis" or "cleft habitus" as Bourdieu labels it (2005: 212). The peasant's reaction was withdrawal from the immediate world—a psychic and emotional "exit," in the sense intended by Albert Hirschman (1972)—into a "traditionalism of despair." On the other hand, hysteresis can lead to mobilization and action. This is the situation Bourdieu describes in *Homo Academicus* (1990) concerning changes in the labor market for academics in France during the 1960s. The system had long worked by balancing the career aspirations of doctoral candidates with the long period of training required to complete the degree—by stabilizing, in other words, the "order of succession" (82). But several key transformations in the education field—more students were admitted, the new importance of "social capital" versus "academic capital" in determining placement, a deflation in the value of a diploma—disrupted the equilibrium between expectations and probabilities. Rather than retreat into despair, however, students and young professors acted. They protested and struck in the dramatic month of May 1968.

Under what conditions does hysteresis lead to mobilization (as among Paris students) rather than despair (as among Algerian peasants)? Bourdieu unfortunately says little about the matter. In the case of Paris, Bourdieu says that mobilization occurred because the general crisis occurred simultaneously in several different fields, allowing agents in homologous positions to synchronize their efforts. Also, spokespersons emerged who were able to translate the general discontent into explicit public positions. Above all else, though, Bourdieu is clear that (mismatched) *dispositions*, not situations, lead to counter-mobilization. In fact, Bourdieu views situations as counter-productive to change. This is because while crises may appear homologous across subfields, should the actual persons meet and interact, they would likely not get along at all. The situation would lack emotional energy, as Randall Collins (2005) calls it, and fail as an interaction ritual. The idea for a successful mobilization against power is to stay at the level of representation: creating symbols but not avoiding situations to mobilize the latent discontent of myriad maladjusted habitus.

Burawoy's take on the issue of "power failures" is the opposite of Bourdieu's insofar as it looks to the internal dynamics of situations rather than external pressures on dispositions. Successful hegemonic control in the workplace depends on constituting work as an enthralling game. It follows that control will fail when the game no longer "pulls the worker in."

Burawoy delineates two specific crises of control. A "system crisis" occurs when workers' game gets so out of hand that it threatens the company's profits. Management may here respond by cracking down on the game, imposing "despotic control" but thereby risking a more total revolt from workers. A "legitimation crisis" occurs when a work-game becomes either too difficult or too easy. Should a worker find it impossible to meet the goals required by the job, or should she find it too easy, the game loses its fun and no longer captures the worker's imagination. Take for example Burawoy's own account of his experience working an industrial drill:

> One of my jobs, which I particularly disliked, involved drilling 3/16-inch holes twelve inches deep into steel "slides"…Because the drills were long and sometimes dull, they frequently broke, and, if they were not caught in time, the pressure could send pieces of steel flying in all directions. The job was not only dangerous but frustrating, because the rate did not allow for the breaking of drills…The job gave me the jitters, and I never even tried to make out after I had broken one or two drills, preferring to stay alive…[W]hen there is too much uncertainty, players cease to play the game. (1979: 87-88)

If Burawoy differs from Bourdieu in explaining control failures as stemming from poorly planned situations, he gives little guidance for understanding how individual-level processes (e.g., a worker frustrated with his drill) can lead to collective action and successful counter-mobilization. Marx himself argued that class formation would progress from individual struggles with machines, to workplace organization into unions, to an international syndicate of workers. Such mobilization did not occur in either the Zambian copper mines nor the American Fordist factory. In both cases, unions were either weakened or became complicit with management. And in both cases, there occurred not a sustained counter-movement but a return to direct repression (colonial despotism in the former, hegemonic despotism in the latter). In sum, though Burawoy focuses on the power of situations in his account of how control is established and falls into crisis, it is less clear the role that situations play in generating and sustaining subsequent movements against power.

Concluding Thoughts

When researchers study organizations, they necessarily must make decisions regarding the analytical weight to be given to dispositional versus situational factors in explaining how control is exercised and resisted. Typically, however, these decisions are made without reflection; assumptions are as a consequence smuggled into the research design, data collection, and interpretation of findings. This paper thus constitutes a call to make explicit our assumptions. Towards this end, I have compared and contrasted the work of Pierre Bourdieu and Michael Burawoy. The two theorists divergent in the emphasis they give to dispositions versus situations, respectively. Are the two theories at loggerheads? Are they

on different sides of the long-standing debate about the relative power of ingrained personalities versus emergent situational properties? Perhaps not. I conclude by proposing three explanations for why their theories differ, and offer a possible resolution to help us go forward with empirical research on work.

First, it is possible that there is an elective affinity between the methodology used by the researcher and the concepts utilized by the theorist. Burawoy, from the start, has practiced workplace participant observation. One could argue that this sort of access (among manual wage workers at the workplace) and this mode of data collection (fieldnotes taken upon the dynamics of the labor process as it occurs in real space and time) lend themselves to an analysis that emphasizes the causal efficacy of the immediate situation. Bourdieu, in contrast, turned away from ethnography as his career progressed, drawing instead upon survey and demographic data. As he became increasingly distant from situations themselves, the argument would go, he became increasingly reliant upon the idea of innate dispositions to make sense of patterns across large datasets.

One could find evidence for such an elective affinity in a comparison of two recent and acclaimed books in the field of labor studies (the last two winners of the outstanding book award given biannually by the American Sociological Association's Labor and Labor Movements section): Steve McKay's *Satanic Mills or Silicon Islands?* and Steve Lopez's *Reorganizing the Rust Belt*. Both are ethnographies of wage workers: McKay studied assembly line workers in electronics factories in the Philippines, Lopez nursing home staff in the United States. But the precise modes of data collection differed. McKay relies mainly on interviews with managers regarding their labor practices and with workers regarding their career histories. In turn, (and though he does not frame his study as an explicit application of Bourdieu's theory), McKay comes to advance a disposition-centered theory of control. He devotes considerable attention to how managers' imagined "ideal worker" was translated into labor recruitment strategies. McKay describes, for instance, how firms send agents out to remote villages to find young women supposedly fit for electronics assembly; these recruitment strategies subsequently interact with the demands of specific market niches to create distinctive labor regimes. The shop floor itself is treated as a site where external dispositions are activated and harnessed by management. McKay's analysis can be contrasted with Lopez's. Lopez worked firsthand as a union organizer, and his book consists of several paired case studies that serve to demonstrate the power of situations. He compares, for instance, two attempts to unionize a nursing home, the first resulting in a losing vote but the second—a year later—resulting in a victory for the union. It would be hard to argue that there occurred in these twelve months any significant changes in the workforce's collective habitus. Rather, Lopez argues that the union succeeded by changing its tactics for communicating with and persuading workers—by learning the character of different situations and encouraging workers to adjust their calculus for assessing the risks and rewards of different institutional arrangements.

The fact that McKay and Lopez use different data collection strategies (interviews versus participant observation) to make disparate arguments about the power of dispositions versus situations suggests that methodologies matter for the types of theory we adopt. But counter-examples are not hard to find. Leslie Salzinger, for instance, has used firsthand observations of workers in the maquiladoras of northern Mexico to argue that managers and workers bring into work pre-forged gender dispositions. And during the course of my own research at the Lordstown auto factory (discussed above), I used interview data to understand the games played by workers on the shop floor today. In sum, the relationship between method and theory is not determinative.

If not the method we use, perhaps the nature of the site itself should influence whether we adopt a dispositional versus a situational theory of organizational power. Consider for instance the temporal stage of development of the larger social system. Weber famously argued that traditional persons were hostile to calculating, profit-maximizing behavior (2001). The new economic system of capitalism could not take root until the proper disposition was present among a critical mass of the populace. This was the historical significance of the Protestant ethic. As a habitus, it proved transposable from the realm of religion to that of the economy, thereby bringing into being capitalism of the modern, rationalized form. Once established, however, capitalism took on a life its own. It no longer mattered one's disposition; to live in a capitalist society is to play by its rules or perish. Hence the metaphor of the iron cage. The more generalizable point from Weber's study would be that while a change in dispositions is essential when transitioning from one social system to another, a stable social formation may be analyzed solely in terms of situational pressures upon individual behavior. In other words, the "work game" is the appropriate concept through which to view work during "settled times," while "habitus" is relevant during "unsettled times."

But I will conclude by discussing a final substantive distinction: that between tightly regulated labor processes—for which immediate situational exigencies determine behavior—and loosely regulated ones—which allow enough free play for pre-existing dispositions to guide action. This is actually more of a continuum. At one end we could imagine the least free of jobs, for instance, those found in a forced labor camp. In their pure forms, such institutions have the power to wipe clean an occupant's past biography and extract a maximum amount of effort. This is why they are labeled total institutions. To understand how power operates in a forced labor camp works, we wouldn't need to know all that much about the early socialization and educational experiences of its prisoners. We could look instead at the immediate system of rewards and punishments, for they serve to level the status of occupants, placing on par a prince and a pauper. (This argument is very much in line with that of David Swartz [1997: 113], who argues that "conduct relies less on habitus in situations that are highly codified [and] regulated"). At the other end of the continuum would be creative industries in which work is largely autonomous. We could here think of artists at work—those who literally confront a blank canvas, and must make constant decisions (and from a wide array of options) concerning their work. When

studying those in such positions, it would make sense to analyze the dispositions they carry with them, for these dispositions, more so than the immediate structure of rewards and punishments, are likely to shape behavior.

Of course, in the real world, most forms of work will fall somewhere in between the concentration camp and the artist studio. This means that it is likely that some combination of disposition forces and situational exigencies will be at play. As researchers, however, we will typically have to make a choice as to which set of forces—dispositions or situations—we believe to be of most relevance for our study, and as to which concepts—habitus, games or some other—we will use to analyze them. Our reasons for making these choices may themselves have something to do with our dispositions (our training, our pre-existing theoretical commitments, etc.) and the situation (our methods, the demands of publishing, etc.)! The important thing is that we are reflexive and explicit about why we make the assumptions and decisions that we do.

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